Even though it is the beginning of 2nd semester, I can still recall standing in front of my locker on the first day of eleventh grade, confident and refreshed from a summer of independent study, and thinking, "It may take some more work than last year, but I will make this my best year yet." My expectations for this year are correct, but not in the ways I initially conceived them.

This school year proves to be proves to be an unparalleled challenge. Teachers, twelfth grade students, and college students frequently describe eleventh grade as an uphill climb. My perspective differs drastically: last semester, I began trudging through a treacherous ascent from the floor of a murky ocean towards the distant shores that are the Advanced Placement exams. In the beginning of the year, I felt myself drowning in assignments and other commitments, gasping and struggling for air as I break the surface between deadlines. I learned time is of the essence, and partitioned my time for optimal effectiveness in handling 3 Advanced Placement courses, varsity cross country on a team of state champions, and Beta Club. During a run in the middle of the semester, I realize that I had strayed from the path to enlightenment: I now placed more emphasis on acquiring a higher grade than efficiently obtaining knowledge and learning how to apply it properly. The moment I came to that realization, I could feel my muscles relax and my body remain suspended in the metaphorical waters. I gaze around, marvel at the breathtaking scenery, and ascend to the surface using the natural buoyancy of self-motivated learning. Assignments are no longer obligations; they are now opportunities to identify gaps in learning. Judging the distance with this newly found perspective, the shores are not too far.